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BOARD OF EDUCATION.

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*Educational Pamphlets, No. 31.*

A RURAL SPECIAL  
SUBJECTS CENTRE.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

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The following report on a rural centre for instruction in special subjects (handicraft, practical mensuration and gardening for boys, laundry work, cookery and household management for girls) has been prepared by two of H.M. Inspectors of Schools. The arrangements at this centre, which serves a number of schools in the district, are distinguished by many special features which might well be reproduced in other areas where similar conditions prevail. The Board of Education have, therefore, published this report for the information of Local Education Authorities, School Managers and other persons interested in Elementary Education.

Office of Special Inquiries and Reports,  
October, 1915.

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## A RURAL SPECIAL SUBJECTS CENTRE.

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1. A Rural Centre for instruction in Special Subjects, which was opened early in 1914, presents several unusual features of interest which make it worth while to report upon it in some detail.

Several methods have been adopted by Local Education Authorities for dealing with the difficult problem of providing instruction in special subjects in small and remote schools. The "Centre" system, which for some reasons might seem the least applicable in a rural district, was, owing to the fortunate circumstance of there being a building and an endowment available, adopted here; and its difficulties have to a large extent been successfully surmounted.

2. *Foundation.*—The buildings are those of an old endowed Grammar School which was no longer needed for this purpose, situated in a village of 700 inhabitants.

By a Scheme, dated August 1912, provision was made for continuing the education of the few remaining scholars in other Secondary Schools and the Governors were empowered to use the land and buildings of the foundation and to allocate a yearly sum of 70*l.* a year in providing instruction of a practical character, the remainder of the income being devoted to Scholarships. A sum of about 550*l.* was spent on improvements, the money being derived from the sale of 300*l.* Consols, and from accumulations of interest and current revenue. The Governors pay to the Local Education Authority a yearly sum of 45*l.* for maintenance, the total cost of which, including teachers' salaries, was 415*l.* for the first year.

3. *Premises.*—The premises consisted of a Headmaster's house together with a schoolroom and a dormitory separated into four cubicles above the schoolroom. There was also a good garden attached to the house and a playing field of about 2 acres. Part of the latter is now enclosed and converted into a school garden. Use has been made of the small and rather dilapidated school premises as follows. The schoolroom has been converted into a combined Cookery and Laundry room and the porch (enlarged) into a scullery. The rooms upstairs are now used for Housewifery, and a new building has been erected for Manual Instruction. The scheme of alterations has been admirably carried out and the premises are now convenient and attractive. The only defect worthy of mention is the ventilation of the Manual Instruction room, which, owing to the particular type of roof, becomes hot and oppressive in summer. A substantial new window is desirable.

Owing to the difficulty of obtaining an adequate supply, water is not laid on in the upstairs rooms and there is no bathroom. While it is no doubt good for the children to have to deal with conditions similar to those in their own homes, the provision of these facilities is recommended, not only as a means of saving unnecessary labour, but in order to afford a more satisfactory training for domestic service in towns.

In general the Centre has been very well equipped, but the addition of a sewing-machine for the girls and a lathe for the boys would be of very great benefit. The children themselves, boys as well as girls, are helping to furnish and decorate the housewifery rooms.

4. *Contributory Schools.*—Children are conveyed by means of brakes from eight surrounding schools, the farthest being about six miles away. The following table shows the size of the contributory schools and the number of children attending. As the bulk of the schools are small it is not possible to obtain enough children of the right age to form first and second year courses in separate classes; but the problem of teaching children at different stages concurrently has been skilfully solved by the teachers.

School.	Average attendance of Older Scholars.	No. attending.		Distance.
		Boys.	Girls.	
School A. - - -	91	20	18	2½ miles.
School B. - - -	75	11	16	4 "
School C. - - -	29	6	2	3 "
School D. - - -	137	17	18	2½ "
School E. - - -	50	12	10	In the village.
School F. - - -	57	8	8	1½ miles.
School G. - - -	26	8	6	6 "
School H. - - -	65	7	12	4 "
	530	89	90	

(N.B.—The scholars from the schools bracketed attend on the same day.)

The cost of conveyance is of course a serious item and accounts for 15s. 2d. of the total amount per scholar (2l. 6s. 2d.) spent on maintenance.

5. *General Nature of Curriculum.*—Except in the case of the boys from School D, where Gardening is already a school subject, the children spend a whole day at the Centre every week. This has enabled a much fuller course of practical work to be undertaken than at the ordinary centre. The boys do practical drawing and mensuration, and have practical instruction in Nature Study in the school garden in addition to handicraft; and the girls do housework which can be spread over the whole day.

The children bring their food for mid-day, and in the case of the girls, eat it at a properly set-out table under the supervision of the teacher; the rest of the short interval is spent in games outside, or in indoor recreations, for which the boys have made various kinds of apparatus.

The provision of some interesting books and papers, some of them bearing upon manual crafts and hobbies, would enable the interval to be still more profitably spent in wet weather.

6. *Work done by Girls.*—The girls learn Laundry Work in the first three months of the first year they attend the Centre, Cookery during the next three months, and a mixed course completes the year's instruction. Combined Domestic Subjects or Practical Household Management is taken in their second year. During the first term the children bring soiled clothes with them from home in the morning and take them back again at night beautifully clean, starched and ironed. Towards the end of the six months they have practice in the organising, washing and finishing of a weekly household washing, as it would occur in their own homes. Attendance at the Centre all day enables this to be done, as the clothes can dry during the dinner hour, whereas it is not always possible to accomplish this in Centres where the girls attend on half a day only.

The usual type of Cookery Course is taken, but it gains very much from the circumstance of the lessons going on all day. For instance, bread, brawn, stews, soups, pickles, jams, and certain other dishes, which take a long time to prepare and cook, can be begun in the morning and finished off in the afternoon; scraps of food left over from the morning's lesson can be cooked up in the afternoon, and, as the children stay to dinner, they have ample practice in the dainty dishing up of food, and in setting a dinner table.

The specialised knowledge gained in the first year's attendance at the Centre is applied in the Household Management Course, where the special processes of Cooking, Washing, and Ironing are performed in their right place, along with other housework, as part of the general routine of the home.

The course includes instruction in the best, quickest, and most hygienic methods of cleaning a house and keeping it clean, and the organisation of this work by the day and week and on special occasions. The instruction aims at bringing about order, freshness and sweetness in the home. The girls are also taught how to choose and keep in good condition furniture (one little girl told us in her essay that it should be dovetailed if possible and not bought on the "higher" system), floor coverings, bedding, and everything used in a house. Simple upholstery, which will help them to mend their own furniture, and keep the covers in order is included in the syllabus. They are all also taught how to make the best use of remnants, how to renovate old clothes, how to keep household accounts, and how

to spend money to the best advantage. Instruction is further given in the care of a baby, and in the preparation of its food.

7. *Work done by Boys.*—The curriculum for the boys is of a very useful rural character. It should lead those who become farmers or enter upon rural industries to be resourceful and intelligent, and give them wider interest in their own occupations and in suitable hobbies.

Measurements, drawings and calculations are made from objects of all kinds, both indoors and outside, leading up to the estimation of the volumes of such objects as haystacks, timber, milk-churns, &c., and the surveying of fields. Cardboard models are constructed when they prove helpful to calculation.

The nature study is largely taken out of doors and is principally concerned with Forestry, Gardening and Bee-keeping, all of which have a very definite bearing upon the occupations of the neighbourhood. Possibly later on it may be found useful to include Poultry-keeping as well. Though Gardening is not taken as an ordinary grant-earning course a plot has been allotted to each school, and experiments are being made by the boys in the cultivation of common vegetables and farm crops. The boys also learn how to graft and bud, and to propagate the common garden plants and fruit trees. Experiments are made in germination; and the dispersal of seeds, and growth of seedling trees are watched. Testing of soils and continuous observations of weather also find a place. A co-operative Bee Society has been formed.

8. *Handicraft.*—The handicraft is chiefly work in wood and metal. After six months have been spent in giving the boys a grounding in the use of tools, during which they make the lighter and more common type of models, they are put on to work for which there is a direct use, either in the school from which they come, the garden, or the Domestic Centre. As far as possible the boys are asked to suggest the method of construction, but this is not allowed to endanger sound workmanship. Some exceedingly interesting objects have already been made, although the Centre has been open such a short time. They include:—Bee Hives (3), Garden Frames (2), Propagator, Tool Shed, a full-sized Wheelbarrow, Seed Boxes, Labels, Guards, &c.; Rain Gauge, Anemometer, Hygrometer, Wind Vane, Sun Dial, &c.; Surveyor's Chain, Opisometer, Surveyor's level, Theodolite, Yard Sticks, &c.; Dressing-table for the Housewifery Centre bedroom. The work also includes repairing cupboards and bookcases, fixing curtain rails, &c., and repairing objects brought from home such as leaky funnels and oil cans.

The work for the Girls' Department is in course of development as the Housewifery Centre has only just been started. A wood-turning lathe would materially help it.

9. *Relation of work to that of the ordinary School.*—It may be noted that one of the drawbacks to the Centre system of



teaching handicraft, viz., the difficulty experienced in relating it to the instruction in other school subjects, is here to a large extent removed. The work done during the day forms a closely-connected group of subjects; each helps the others, and the gardening forms the motive for much of the constructive work. The co-operation between the teachers of the domestic and manual Centres is also an excellent feature; the boys greatly appreciate the share they are taking in furnishing the house and the girls will no doubt think more highly of the articles their brothers have made than of those provided by the Authority.

There is still a need, however, for further co-ordination of the work of Centre and school, and it is therefore to be regretted that two of the Head Teachers of contributory schools have not yet visited the Centre. A general understanding is desirable as to the work which should be done in the lower standards in preparation for the work of the Centre, and as to which parts of the curriculum might be dropped when the children start manual and domestic work. It is suggested that a conference between the Head Teachers of the schools and of the Centre would be useful in this connection. In the case of Mixed Schools under a Headmaster it is suggested that the assistant teacher responsible for the Needlework should also see the work in operation and if possible join in the conference.

10. *Interest of Scholars and Teachers in the work.*—Apart from this criticism, it is satisfactory to note the interest which the Head Teachers take in the work. They evidently hold a high opinion of it and nearly all speak of an observable increase of intelligence and general interest on the part of the scholars. The children bring some of their models and dishes back to School and tell their teachers about the work done: more use might be made of their experiences, however, in the composition exercises; the teachers at the Centre could no doubt suggest many suitable topics. There is no question that the children take the keenest interest in the work. The weekly journey is an incident in their often monotonous lives, their minds are broadened by contact with fresh teachers and they feel that the work they are doing is useful at home and after they leave school. It is satisfactory to find evidence that some of them are already applying at home the work they have learnt at the Centre. The girls are allowed to take a more responsible share in the home and the boys make or mend articles for their parents in their spare time. In one instance this appreciation of the child's work by the parents led to undesirable results; one parent now shows a strong tendency to keep her child at home on washing days.

In several schools there is also evidence that the work is having an effect on the leaving age. There are several children of 14 who would in the ordinary course have left at 13, and there is a clear tendency for children to stay at school to finish

their practical course. One boy of 14 attends irregularly on other days, but never misses the Centre day.

11. *Effect on other Subjects.*—The opinion of all the Head Teachers concerned was sought as to whether there had been any falling off in attainments in the essential subjects owing to the whole day a week spent at the Centre. All said there was no evidence of this so far, though some thought that subjects such as History, Geography and Recitation might suffer. It was pointed out to them that more time could be given to these subjects if the time given to Observation Lessons and Mensuration—work which is done efficiently at the Centre—were curtailed.

12. *Opinions of Managers and Parents.*—It is very satisfactory to find that the opinion of Managers, some of whom were at first for various good reasons inclined to doubt the advisability of sending the children to the Centre, seems to be very favourable to the scheme now that experience has been gained of its working. So far as can be ascertained the opinion of parents also is generally favourable; the one or two objections that have been raised are in respect of the journey and not the instruction. The proposal to hold an open “Parents Day” in the summer is one greatly to be commended. It is yet too early to say whether the work has influenced the future occupations of the scholars; though at one school the Headmaster thought the girls were getting better posts in domestic service in consequence.

13. *Efficiency of Instruction.*—The Committee have been fortunate in their choice of staff.

(a) *Domestic Subjects.*—The instruction given in Domestic Subjects is of a sensible, useful and stimulating character. The teacher gets the best possible amount of work from the girls in a spontaneous and interesting way, and they become more self-reliant and resourceful as the course progresses. The general tone and atmosphere of the classes are excellent.

The girls have set the Housewifery rooms in order this term by themselves, under the guidance of the teacher, besides doing some of the usual housework. They have washed and stained the floors before putting down the carpets and linoleums, made the stain and polishes, made the curtains, bed sides, mats, hemmed the table-linen and bed-linen, &c. With regard to this household sewing, it is to be regretted that much valuable time, which could have been spent to more profitable purpose in acquiring skill in other household duties not already known to the girls, was spent in sewing these long seams by hand, when they could have been done equally well, and infinitely quicker by the sewing-machine. This waste of time is especially purposeless, when it is realised that 82 per cent. of the girls attending the Centre have sewing-machines at home, and one-third of them can use them. When the girls were questioned

they showed an intimate knowledge of the cost of the furnishings of the house and the materials they were using; it was also evident that they understood the practice of thrift.

This term the children are looking forward to making a herb garden for themselves, and they are hoping to be able to buy some of their vegetables from the boys in the summer.

Evidence of the value of the work being done, is shown in the frequent visits paid to the Centre by girls who have left school. They call to see the teacher and discuss with her any difficulties arising out of their work at home or in service.

(b) *Handicraft, &c.*—The Woodwork instructor has good handicraft qualifications and an interest in rural work, and since his appointment he has taken further steps to improve his knowledge in the subjects which were outside his previous teaching experience. His teaching shows keenness and capacity and at each visit of inspection a definite advance in the methods of instruction has been noted. The boys understand what they do, they work rapidly and with increasing accuracy. As the work has become more purposeful and real in character the interest of both teacher and scholars has deepened, and dissatisfaction with the artificial type of model is felt. The inclusion of work in other materials than wood has been the natural outcome of the development in the direction of utility, and still further experiments of this nature are to be looked for.

14. *Conclusion.*—Both the Governors of the foundation and the Local Education Authority are to be congratulated on the success of their scheme for the utilisation of this endowment, which has not been accomplished without hard and zealous work on the part of officials and members of the Governing Body. The inhabitants should feel that the money bequeathed to them for educational purposes is being put to the best of uses and is really fulfilling the intentions of the founders in a way suited to modern conditions. The good results achieved here should stimulate other Trustees of rural Charities to apply their funds to schemes of a like character, either by the provision of a centre serving several schools or by affording facilities at one or more individual schools according as circumstances permit.

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